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The Pope and Catholicism

Many Catholics are questioning the liability behind what the Pope has been saying because they think he is too liberal with what he says, and that it may not always go with what the Catholic Church teaches. However, there are Catholics out there who like what he has to say; and because of this there seems to be a divide happening amongst Catholics. What is actually going on? Has what the Pope been saying actually contradicting the Catholic Churches teachings, or not?

Is the Pope Catholic? Well of course he is, or at least that’s what we think. Doesn’t the Pope have to be Catholic, in order to be the Pope? Yes, however many Catholics are seriously reconsidering if he is or not, based on how far left they think he is. I feel that this is a very important topic as whether he is Catholic or not, or if his teachings contradict the Catholic Church’s or not has a huge impact on numerous peoples spiritual lives, including mine.

Did you know that according to Fallible Blogma RSS there are about 1.1 billion Roman Catholics in the world? They also state that in addition to this there are also around 240 million Eastern Orthodox Catholics. Pope Francis is the leader of a huge, and the biggest, denomination, and has over a billion people looking up to him as a spiritual mentor. As the Pope it is his job to preach the Word of Jesus Christ, and to promote the Catholic teachings. The question though is: Does he?

BACKGROUND AND SECONDARY RESEARCH:

Through my research I have found out some pretty interesting things regarding Pope Francis and the Catholic Church. Baden says, almost from the beginning there have been rumblings of discontent about Pope Francis. He also stated that while the worlds media fell in love with him, there were more conservative bishops who felt that Francis’s popular appeal came at the expense of carefully worked-out Church rituals and teachings. They saw Francis as chipping away at established Church teachings on sexuality, kowtowing to the liberal media, and acting aggressively towards conservative Church leaders, says The Daily Beast. They also stated that Bishop Thomas Tobin, writing on his diocesan website, accused Francis of being fond of “making a mess” and stated that the Synod voting concept “Struck him as being rather Protestant.” Tobin seems to be suggesting that with Francis at the helm, the Catholic Church is no longer acting like the Catholic Church, states The Daily Beast.

One of the issues some people have with Pope Francis is his mixed messages on sexuality. According to The New York Times, when Pope Francis has spoken about homosexuality, he has tended to take a pastoral approach, calling on the church to love and care for all. They also say that Pope Francis stands firmly on Church teachings on the traditional family and opposing same-sex marriage. On July 29th 2013 Pope Francis uttered his most unexpected and universally quoted remark as the Pope: “Who am I to judge?” He objected lobbies of all kinds, though he did not object to gay people, states The New York Times. They also said that, what he said instead was “If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?”

His saying the phrase “Who am I to judge” spread worldwide as it was a huge change in tone from the Pope before him, Pope Benedict XVI, states Laurie Goodstein. She also says that Pope Benedict XVI spoke of gays or “homosexuals” as having an “objective disorder” – a phrase that comes directly from the Catechism of the Catholic Church. According to Laurie Goodstein, Pope Francis also used the word “gay”, which is the term that many gay people prefer instead of “homosexual”, implying that he was far more comfortable and conversant than expected of a Catholic prelate. Pope Francis wanted to clarify what he meant by his “Who I am to judge” comment, states The New York Times. They also stated, Pope Francis did this by suggesting that the Catholic Church must be free to publicly advocate its positions on homosexuality, but that all people – including gay people – should also be free to seek and find God. He also stated that “Religion has the right to express its opinion in the service of the people, but God in creation has set us free: It is not possible to interfere spiritually in the life of a person.” according to The New York Times.

Another thing Pope Francis did regarding the issue of sexuality is tried to shift the approach to gay people, to love from disapproval. Pope Francis said, once a person had asked him, in a provocative manner, if he approved of homosexuality, states Laurie Goodstein. She also stated, he responded with another question asking “Tell me: When God looks at a gay person, does he endorse the existence of this person with love, or reject and condemn this person? We must always consider the person”.

The next issue some people have with Pope Francis is that of abortion. On September 1st 2015, Pope Francis said something that got some Catholics upset. According to the Cable News Network, Pope Francis did this by announcing that priests around the world will be authorized to forgive the “sin of abortion” when the church begins a “Year of Mercy” in December 2015. Pope Francis also said: “The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented,” and that he has met “many women” scarred by the “agonizing and painful” decision to have an abortion, states CNN. However the Pope’s policy does not change church doctrine, but only applies to the Year of Mercy, says CNN. Why only the Year of Mercy though? It is this way because the Year of Mercy is a centuries-old Catholic Practice during which believers may receive special indulgences for their sins, suggests Central News Network. The mercy year begins on December 8th 2015 and goes until November 20th 2016, says CNN. They also said that it is possible the pontiff will allow the abortion policy to continue in perpetuity. CNN also states that the Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the person who procures an abortion incurs automatic excommunication, a penalty that often only a bishop can lift. This is why there are experts in the Catholic canon law who expressed confusion about the practical effects of the Pope’s announcement, states CNN.

Another issue regarding Pope Francis is the one of birth control. Pope Francis has spoken quite a bit about the issue of birth control. First he said: “Some think, excuse me if I use the word, that in order to be good Catholics, we have to be like rabbits – but no,” then adding the Church promoted “responsible parenthood”, says Reuters. They also said that the Pope mentioned a woman he recently met who already had seven children by caesarean sections and put her life at risk by becoming pregnant again. According to Reuters the Pope said he chided her for “tempting God” and added: “That was an irresponsibility.” However not too long after he said this, Pope Francis praised large families as a “true gift from God” says the Catholic Herald. They also said the Pope stated: “It gave him ‘consolation and hope’ to see so many large families during papal visit to South Asia. With Pope Francis saying this it left numerous Catholics very confused.

Another topic that is also of concern is, will there be a schism, or divide, in the Catholic Church to the leadership of Pope Francis? According to The Daily Beast, Ross Douthat, a columnist at The New York Times and a convert to Roman Catholicism, warned that Francis’s current path would “eventually lead to real schism.” He also says that with the threat of schism hanging in the air “True Catholics” must “resist” the Pope’s pressure to change the Church.

PRIMARY RESEARCH, METHODS AND FINDINGS:

For my primary research I decided to interview a couple people to see what they thought of Pope Francis. The first question I asked was: “What do you think of Pope Francis?” One person said that she likes Pope Francis, and she truly thinks he is good for the world and has love for all mankind. The other person, however, said yes he was elected by the church, but he thinks that he is leading the church in a different direction. He also said that Pope John Paul II was more conservative and Francis is more of a left wing socialist Pope, pretty communistic, and thinks that he is leading the church on the wrong path. This person also said that Pope Francis is not conservative and wants open borders.

The second question I asked was a little different for each person because of the answers they gave to the previous question. For my mom I asked: “Why do you think this?” Her answer was: “I think this because he’s asking us as human beings to open our hearts. He wants us to treat our neighbor as ourselves, it’s quite that simple. Whereas for my dad I asked: “Why is his wanting open borders a bad thing?” His answer was: He doesn’t believe in a country, he wanted illegal immigrants to come over and do whatever they want, and doesn’t believe in sovereignty.

The third question was: “Why do you think he tends to be too conservative or liberal?” My mother answered: “Yes, I tend to think he tends to be left of center, but in my heart I feel he’s doing his best to walk the walk. By this I mean he is showing us how he feels Christ would want us to be towards our fellow man.” As for my father, he answered by saying: “He comes from a communist/socialist country Argentina. He was raised that way, so now he’s putting his views on everyone else. The church is in turmoil because the conservatives and progressives there’s a lot of fighting going on between them in the church because of this.”

The fourth question I asked them was: “Why do you think this is or is not going to cause a divide in the church?” My mom answered by saying: “No one is ever going to be happy with the Pope we have, the President we have, the government we have, heck even the teachers in high school we have had. The fact is Jesus was a Radical. He ate with sinners, tax collectors, prostitutes, and told us what right do we have to cast the first stone? It’s easy to become cynical in our world today, but what I think Pope Francis is saying overall is if we think a little more with our heart and use that as a guide instead of being self-centered wouldn’t that be a better world to live in?” My dad, on the other hand, said: “Pope Francis is already causing a division in the church between cardinals, and more liberal cardinals in South America, Central America, and parts of Europe. He is causing both sides to go against one another.”

As for my final question I asked: “Why do you think his teachings do or do not contradict with the churches?” My mom said: “I don’t think they contradict with the churches thus far. I think he is just waking up those who like things status quo. What I really think is that our boat needed rocking. He’s telling us to step out of our comfortable little world and look around, take a moment and notice the suffering, those in need, those with heartache. Isn’t that what Jesus asked us to do? As for my dad, he answered by saying: “He’s on a fine line of what he preaches. On Climate Control he should stay out of it, not a religious thing. He doesn’t know what he is talking about. He wants to be more in tune with Muslims and Islam. Shouldn’t try to go to Islam countries and try to make peace with them. Preach the Word of Jesus Christ and should stay out of peoples business.”

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: